

Future Direction of DWR/USBR Suisun Marsh Activities

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The Delta Accord (December 1994) marked the beginning of a transition period in DWR and USBR Suisun Marsh activities. The subsequent SWRCB 1995 Bay/Delta Plan (May 1995) and Order WR 95-6 (June 1995) changed the regulatory basis used to develop the multi-phase implementation of facilities in the Plan of Protection for the Suisun Marsh (1984).

In response to these events, DWR and USBR stopped the planning and environmental documentation for the Western Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Project (Phases III and IV) in 1995. Over the past two years, DWR and USBR, in conjunction with DFG and the Suisun Resource Conservation District, have reexamined whether additional large-scale facilities are needed and have considered other management actions to mitigate impacts of the water projects and other upstream diverters on managed wetlands in Suisun Marsh.

Regulatory Framework

The purpose of the SWRCB Suisun Marsh salinity objectives is to provide water of sufficient quality to the managed wetlands to achieve soil water salinity capable of supporting plants characteristic of a brackish marsh (SWRCB Environmental Report, 1995 Bay/Delta Plan, Appendix 1, page IX-15 *et seq.*). According to Order WR 95-6 (which amended Decision 1485 in June 1995), DWR and USBR must meet the salinity standards at eastern and western marsh compliance stations until December 1998. The three eastern marsh stations and western station S-21 have been in effect since Decision 1485, and three other western marsh standards (S-42, S-35, S-97) became effective in October 1997. DWR and

USBR must achieve the mean monthly high tide channel water salinity at the three new stations or must demonstrate to SWRCB that equivalent or better protection will be provided at these locations.

Contractual Framework

DWR, DFG, USBR, and Suisun Resource Conservation District signed the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement on March 2, 1987. An objective of the Preservation Agreement is to assure that USBR and DWR mitigate for any adverse effects of the CVP and SWP on managed marsh wetlands, as well as a portion of the adverse effects of other upstream diversions. Under the original agreement, this objective is accomplished by constructing large-scale facilities in Suisun Marsh (eg, the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates) to maintain a dependable supply of adequate quality water in marsh channels. DWR, USBR, DFG, and SRCD have worked cooperatively since the early 1980s to implement the Plan of Protection for the Suisun Marsh, developed in response to Condition 7 of Decision 1485. To date, DWR and USBR, with input from DFG and SRCD, have completed Phase I (Initial Facilities, 1980) and Phase II (Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates, 1988) of the Plan of Protection, and made significant progress on the planning and environmental documentation for Phases III and IV, directed at the western marsh (1990-1995). However, DWR and USBR suspended work on the Western Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Project in 1995 to reevaluate the needs of the western marsh under the expected hydrologic conditions imposed by the 1995 Bay/Delta Plan.

Status of Suisun Ecological Workgroup

DWR convened the multi-agency Suisun Ecological Workgroup (SEW) in August 1995 at the suggestion of the SWRCB. Initial activities of SEW included developing background information on brackish marsh ecology, the history of Suisun Marsh, management of diked seasonal wetlands, the scientific basis for Decision 1485 Suisun Marsh Standards, and identifying beneficial uses of Suisun Marsh.

SEW's first technical task since these initial investigations was to evaluate water quality objectives for resources such as plants, wildlife, and fish. To facilitate this, the workgroup divided into four resource-specific subcommittees: Brackish Marsh Vegetation, Wildlife, Waterfowl, and Aquatic Habitat. These subcommittees are evaluating the effects of existing western marsh salinity standards on the resource being considered and developing recommendations for resource-specific water quality objectives, as well as for future studies and compliance monitoring programs. A fifth subcommittee is working in conjunction with DWR Suisun Marsh Planning to evaluate water quality and hydrology issues in the marsh. The subcommittees began meeting independently in October 1995 and produced work plans in February 1996. SEW submitted a status report to SWRCB in September 1997.

SEW's next step will be to evaluate the impacts of resource-specific objectives and to develop appropriate multi-resource (ecosystem) water quality objectives. This process will be undertaken by the workgroup as a whole and is scheduled to be

completed by October 1998, when SEW will present its recommendations to SWRCB.

For more information about SEW, or to see meeting summaries or subcommittee work plans, please visit the SEW home page at www.wiep.water.ca.gov/sew/sew.html.

Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement Amendment Process

In July 1995, USBR, DWR, DFG, and SRCD began negotiating to update the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement and established an *ad hoc* Negotiating Team, Technical Group, Drafting Committee, and Environmental Documentation Team.

Based on the analysis of the Technical Group, parties to the Preservation Agreement agree that additional large-scale facilities proposed in the Plan of Protection will not be necessary for salinity control in Suisun Marsh because of the effectiveness of the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates in conjunction with the outflows specified in the 1995 Bay/Delta Plan.

In lieu of large facilities, the Negotiation Team has identified a series of management actions (listed below) consistent with the Preservation Agreement objectives. The purpose of these actions are to:

- Improve water and habitat management on managed wetlands throughout Suisun Marsh;
- Lower diversion water and soil salinity on western marsh managed wetlands; and
- Provide funds to managed wetlands for more intensive management activities to remove soil salts in response to prolonged drought conditions.

Management actions include:

- Meet channel water salinity standards in Order 95-6.
- Convert S-35 and S-97 from compliance stations to monitoring stations.
- September operation of the Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates.
- Water Manager Program.
- Update existing management plans.
- Joint-use facilities program.
- Managed Wetland Improvement Fund.
- Consolidate and redirect Morrow Island drainage to Suisun Bay.
- Portable diversion pumps with fish screens.
- Portable drainage pumps.
- Realign and stabilize Roaring River Distribution System turnouts.
- Drought Response Fund.

Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement negotiators pursued an alternative with the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District to construct an intertie between the treatment plant and Green Valley Creek and discharge treated effluent into the northwestern marsh. However, FSSD notified the Preservation Agreement parties that there are too many obstacles to allow this project to proceed at this time.

Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement Amendment Three

The Drafting Committee has agreed on provisions to implement and fund the management actions under Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement Amendment Three. DWR and USBR will fund the actions, and Suisun Resource Conservation District will have a significant role in implementing many of the management actions. The amendment will be executed after completion of the necessary environmental documen-

tation. The Environmental Documentation Team has completed a draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment, and copies of the draft environmental document were provided to FWS and NMFS. The Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement parties are working to complete the amendment process, including the environmental documentation, by early 1998.

SWRCB Order WR 95-6 and Water Right Hearing

On September 19, DWR and USBR petitioned SWRCB to extend the compliance date specified in Order WR 95-6 for western marsh stations S-35 and S-97 to October 1998. This petition was submitted with the endorsement of DFG and SRCD. The additional time will enable the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement parties to execute and begin implementing Amendment Three.

SWRCB has included similar management actions as an alternative in its EIR for implementing the 1995 Bay/Delta Plan (September 12, 1996, SWRCB letter to the Bay-Delta mailing list). During the Water Right hearing for implementing the 1995 Bay/Delta Plan, the Suisun Marsh Preservation Agreement parties will recommend that SWRCB select these actions as the next step in implementing the objectives for Suisun Marsh managed wetlands.